

VZCZCXRO3494  
PP RUEHIK RUEHLN RUEHPD RUEHSK RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHKV #0039/01 0091619  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 091619Z JAN 09  
FM AMEMBASSY KYIV  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6997  
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE  
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KYIV 000039

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [UP](#)  
SUBJECT: UKRAINE'S MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE EMPHASIZES  
INDEPENDENT STANCE

Sensitive but unclassified. Please handle accordingly.

#### Summary

1. (SBU) The head of external relations for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church - Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) emphasized its apolitical stance in a meeting with Emboff. He acknowledged that the church's pro-Yanukovych position in the 2004 presidential elections was a mistake and emphasized its independence as a Ukrainian branch of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). He credited Metropolitan Volodymyr with holding together Ukraine's Orthodox community, which was at risk of fracturing because of President Yushchenko's efforts to get official recognition for churches considered schismatic by the UOC-MP. He did not rule out the possibility that Volodymyr could become the next patriarch of the ROC but hinted that he was not the most likely candidate.  
End Summary.

#### Support for Yanukovych in 2004 a Mistake

2. (SBU) Archimandrite Cyril Hovorun, Chief of the UOC-MP's External Relations Department, emphasized that the church took an apolitical stance in recent years following its open support for Viktor Yanukovych in the 2004 presidential elections. He acknowledged that the church's support for Yanukovych had been a mistake. To highlight his point, he noted that the church has stayed out of politics since 2004. He also mentioned that the church publicly condemned unofficial Orthodox groups in 2007, which had made unauthorized pro-Russian statements in the name of the church.

#### ROC Should Respect Ukraine

3. (SBU) Hovorun emphasized that the UOC-MP had been asserting its independence as a Ukrainian branch of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). He noted that ROC leaders had expressed displeasure about the UOC-MP Synod's resolution on December 20, 2008 to support UOC-MP Metropolitan Volodymyr's candidacy for the Patriarch of the ROC. Although the synod's statement was not an official nomination, but rather a statement of support should Volodymyr choose to accept, it was signal of independence by the UOC-MP. Hovorun concluded that church leadership in Moscow will have to learn to accept and respect Ukraine's independence.

#### Volodymyr still Needed in Ukraine

4. (SBU) Hovorun mentioned that Volodymyr has not accepted the synod's offer of support to become Patriarch of the ROC and added that he was still needed in Ukraine. He hinted that Volodymyr was not the most likely candidate to fill the position left vacant after Alekisy's death. However, Hovorun

did not rule out the possibility that Volodymyr could become the next Patriarch of the ROC

#### Volodymyr Prevents Split

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¶5. (SBU) Hovorun said that President Yushchenko's involvement in the celebrations marking the 1020th anniversary of the Christianization of the Kyiv Rus in July 2008 almost caused a split in the UOC-MP. Yushchenko, who has long sought to establish a unified Ukraine Orthodox church independent of Moscow's influence, invited the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I without conferring with the UOC-MP. The ROC reacted negatively to Bartholomew's invitation but Russian Patriarch Aleksiy eventually agreed to attend the ceremonies in Kyiv. Hovorun felt that Yushchenko should have consulted the church before inviting Bartholomew.

¶6. (SBU) Hovorun believes that Yushchenko wanted Bartholomew to officially recognize the Ukrainian Orthodox Church - Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP) and Ukrainian Autocephalous Church (UAC). Bartholomew's recognition of the UOC-KP and UAC, considered to be schismatic by the UOC-MP, has been strongly opposed by UOC-MP and ROC leadership. Hovorun said that if Bartholomew were to recognize the "schismatic" churches, UOC-MP communities in western Ukraine would likely break from the UOC-MP while its communities in the east would seek closer ties to the ROC.

¶7. (SBU) Hovorun said that Volodymyr negotiated with Bartholomew, Patriarch Aleksiy of the ROC, and the leaders of

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the UOC-KP and UAC in the lead-up to the July celebrations to avoid a split. When the celebrations were held, both Bartholomew and Aleksiy made general statements calling for unity and understanding within Ukraine's Orthodox community while UOC-KP and UAC leaders kept a low profile. If Bartholomew had recognized the UOC-KP and UAC, this would have weakened the UOC-MP's unifying influence and exacerbated divisions between eastern and western Ukraine asserted Hovorun. He added that Volodymyr had sought to improve relations with the UOC-KP and UAC by establishing a dialogue with the churches since the July events.

Comment

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¶8. (SBU) Recent events seem to confirm Hovorun's assertion that the UOC-MP is willing to express views not well received in Moscow. For example, in November it released a statement referring to the Holodomor as genocide. We also noted that Metropolitan Volodymyr played a prominent role in the official commemoration of the Holodomor in November. Although Hovorun did not rule out the possibility that Volodymyr could become patriarch of the ROC, his advanced years and frailty make this unlikely.

TAYLOR